

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 671
INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS
AMEMBASSY VICTORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L ANTANANARIVO 1202

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDIP, MA
SUBJ: NATIONAL DAY IN MADAGASCAR

1. SUMMARY: NATIONAL DAY 1978 WAS CELEBRATED WITH LESS FANFARE THAN LAST YEAR, PRIMARILY DUE TO ABSENCE THIS YEAR OF A "MITABE", THE NORTH KOREAN INSPIRED AND DIRECTED MASS STUDENT EXERCISES. MILITARY PARADE DISPLAYED SOME EXAMPLES OF NEWLY ACQUIRED BUT VINTAGE WEAPONS FROM COMMUNIST SUPPLIERS. OFFICIAL PRESS BULLETIN IS LISTING COUNTRIES SENDING GREETINGS BUT SO FAR NO MENTION OF US MESSAGE DELIVERED FRIDAY, JUNE 23. AT RECEPTION FOLLOWING PARADE I FINALLY GOT TO MEET PRESIDENT RATSIRAKA WHO GREETED ME BRIEFLY BUT CORDIALLY. END SUMMARY:

2. ABSENCE OF "MITABE" PROBABLY DUE TO COST OF EXERCISE LAST YEAR IN MONEY, STUDY TIME LOST DURING PRACTICE SESSIONS FOR STUDENTS TAKING PART, AND CONSEQUENT DISCONTENT OF PARENTS. CYNICAL OBSERVERS SAY GOVERNMENT DIDN'T WANT THAT GREAT NUMBER OF VOLATILE STUDENTS
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IN ONE PLACE AFTER DISORDERS OF MAY 29-30 BUT DECISION NOT TO REPEAT "MITABE" MUST HAVE BEEN TAKEN WELL BEFORE THOSE EVENTS.

3. WEAPONS ON DISPLAY FOR FIRST TIME AT MILITARY PARADE WERE TWO HIGH VELOCITY ANTI-AIRCRAFT ARTILLERY PIECES, RESEMBLING OUR OWN 90 MM CANNON, AND FIVE TWIN-37MM. ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS. DAO WILL BE REPORTING AT GREATER LENGTH ON THIS ASPECT.

4. FOLLOWING COUNTRIES HAVE SO FAR BEEN LISTED AS SENDING NATIONAL DAY GREETINGS: NORTH KOREA, VIETNAM, EAST GERMANY, FRANCE, EGYPT, POLAND, BULGARIA, SOVIET UNION, ALBANIA, ROMANIA, PEOPLES CHINA, HUNGARY, MOZAMBIQUE, CONGO, BENIN, HOLY SEE. ONLY MESSAGE SO FAR SELECTED FOR SPECIAL TREATMENT HAVE BEEN FROM YUGOSLAVIA AND CUBA.

5. I MET RATSIRAKA FOR THE FIRST TIME AT THE RECEPTION FOLLOWING THE MILITARY REVIEW. HE WAS RELAXED AND CORDIAL, EXPRESSING PLEASURE AT MEETING MY WIFE AND ME AND GRACIOUSLY ACCEPTING OUR CONGRATULATIONS.

6. CONTRARY TO EXPECTATIONS NO END WAS PRONOUNCED TO THE 9 TO 5 CURFEW ON THIS OCCASION. TRADITIONAL AMNESTY PRONOUNCED ON THIS OCCASION ONLY APPLIES TO COMMON LAW PRISONERS SERVING 15 DAYS OR LESS IN PRISON.

7. COMMENT: CELEBRATIONS THIS YEAR DID NOT HAVE THE SENSE OF EXCITEMENT AS LAST YEAR. ON THE OTHER HAND PRESIDENTIAL RECEPTION HELD INSIDE, WAS MORE CHEERFUL AND INTIMATE THAN THE MORE FORMAL OUTDOOR PARTY HELD LAST YEAR, AT WHICH RATSIRAKA ONLY STAYED A FEW MINUTES. THIS TIME HE WAS THERE FOR A LONG TIME RECEIVING GREETERS AND SEEMED TO SHARE THE FESTIVE MOOD OF THE OTHER MALAGASY PRESENT, FOR WHOM NATIONAL DAY IS NOT ONLY FOR OFFICIAL OBSERVANCE BUT ALSO A FAMILY HOLIDAY, ACCOMPANIED BY MUCH KISSING AND GOOD
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